

International SOF tackle global security

USSOCOM leads way by hosting first International SOF Week

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General Doug Brown, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command gave the opening remarks at the first USSOCOM International Special Operations Forces Week conference June 8 at the Tampa Convention Center.

"We are truly honored to host so many international guests as well as U.S. military and civilian leadership and our industry partners," he said.

The event was an extraordinary opportunity to build new friendships, strengthen acquaintances and learn how we, as a coalition team, can train and partner together to improve security, stabilize societies, improve quality of life for our citizens, enhance cultural awareness, share tactics, techniques and procedures, and when required – defeat global threats, he said.

Brown said everyone comes from different backgrounds, cultures, religions, politics and experiences, and we would never presume to understand them all. "But there is a bond we all share in the profession of special operations."

The commander defines SOF as a small specially organized, trained and equipped military force manned by carefully selected people. Using modified equipment, SOF are trained to accomplish specialized missions that conventional forces are not trained nor equipped to do. "Our strengths are not in numbers, it's in the innovation of our forces across a spectrum of capabilities, their superior physical and mental fitness, their adaptability, and most of all their judgment and initiative which guide them in the most challenging and unexpected circumstances."

All SOF stand on common ground to defend and secure their nations. Rejecting terror and tyranny is not associated with any particular culture, according to Brown. "Belief in human dignity is not restricted by politics or geography – these are basic human values that as civilized nations we all share – and seek to defend."

SOF complete high-level training, operate in hostile environments and are tested under fire of battle. "Honor is our hallmark – the bravery, razor-sharp skills and devotion to duty of SOF are key factors in determining the ultimate outcome of any conflict we may face.

"We've trekked alongside each other through thick mountain jungles to build a school or clinic in a remote village. We've quietly prowled through murky waters and along far away beaches in a stealthy pursuit of an unsuspecting foe – and just as we did this past December, many of us have worked side-by-side in nothing less than heroic efforts to help victims of natural disasters."

Many years of training together has built a Special Operations Force operating across the spectrum of operations from pre-crisis to post-crisis, he said. The next step is to bring the cooperation to the next level by building global networks of special operations capabilities.

The mission continued during ISOF Week with thought-provoking speeches on the international special operations environment. Brown encouraged everyone to learn more about each other's capabilities, to gain a better understanding of each other's thoughts and plans in today's operational environment, particularly in global security issues, and to continue to develop mutually beneficial approaches to coalition operations.

He also challenged all the members to look beyond the traditional roles and missions in search of new, approaches to the way SOF train and operate together.

“With this incredible group together for the first time in one place we have a unique and powerful opportunity to openly talk about the issues we face today and prepare ourselves for the unknown challenges that will emerge on the future’s horizon,” he said.

Brown also stressed the importance of non-military skills and expertise such as diplomacy, information, economics and finance – the interagency partners are a key component of the international team. In addition he said industry partners are enabling SOF to network and operate in ways never thought possible. Technology is a key enabler of special operations, however, the challenge is interoperability. Without interoperability between coalition partners we will deny ourselves our full potential as an interagency and international team.

“Our future rests in a globalized system, one that Thomas Friedman (New York Times reporter) characterizes as ‘the (unstoppable) integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before.’”

The commander said USSOCOM’s operations tempo is expected to remain high for the foreseeable future, which will affect the amount of training conducted with our coalition partners. “But we will pursue every opportunity we can ... we’ve learned we can’t wait until a crisis occurs to develop effective working relationships. Our relationships must be habitual.” Relationships nurture trust – the cornerstone of the special operations culture. “We train and operate as one joint/coalition team in order to build the trust between operators that can transcend the chaos of war.”

Supporting regional training is the responsibility of USSOCOM’s theater special operations commands. As a sub-unified command, TSOCs act as a conduit with regionally oriented, culturally trained, and language proficient SOF in their areas of responsibility to facilitate geographic combatant command and USSOCOM regional objectives.

“As a global community we all have an interest and role in addressing and preventing the circumstances that lead people to make the leap from non-violent opposition to dissent to violent opposition,” he said. “If we fail to confront impending dangers, we imperil ourselves. The statesmen, Edmund Burke, aptly warned ‘All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.’ The threat of global terrorism is a threat that requires a long and determined effort from all of us.”

Brown believes the key to success in GWOT is joint, coalition, combined and interagency operations. “They have built a network to defeat us and it will take a network to defeat them.”

According to Brown, combat is not the only way to prevent terrorism. The primary goal is to keep national security threats to our nations, such as terrorism, from emerging in the first place. Improving local conditions for citizens makes areas untenable for terrorists. Through diplomatic, informational and economic efforts, interagency partners can negotiate and provide aid to vulnerable regions. Psychological and Information Operations can provide a powerful voice to enable the oppressed or misinformed populations to “hear the truth.”

“Our adversaries will try to convince us that our coalitions cannot prevail,” he said. “They will try to make us believe that our diversity is a weakness – they are wrong.

We must always remember that we cannot let the bonds we forge dissolve after the shooting stops or a crisis is over – building coalitions for the long-term means for the long-term, not just when it is convenient for current operations.”

As crises emerge across the globe, SOF is enabling rapid dissemination of information, rapid decision making, rapid movement, and rapid mission accomplishment. However Brown cautioned, “We must balance our sense of urgency with a sense of patient persistence.

"There is a Chinese proverb that tells us, 'if your vision is for a year, plant wheat ... if your vision is for a decade plant trees. If your vision is for a lifetime, plant people – we are planting people.'"



Gen. Doug Brown, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, introduces Vice President Dick Cheney at the first International Special Operations Forces Week MacDill AFB, Fla. The week involved 58 international countries with more than 2,000 attendees participating in conferences, exhibitions and demonstrations. Photo by Steve Hebert